3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
NO6 Comanche NO6

The Comanches

302 Black was the
[822] war paint—the emblem of death—but red, yellow, olive green, and blue were favorite colors. There appears to have been no uniform manner of make-up. One warrior painted his face red, his eyelids white, and streaked his face with black. Another painted one side black and the other yellow down to the waist; another wore red on one side and yellow on the other, with lines of black upon his cheeks.

●304 Tattooing was not conspicuous in the Comanche tribe, but both
301 sexes tattooed the face and body, the chest being the most commonly used part of the torso.[28] Clinton Smith records that his chief had a black star tattooed on his chest.[29] The warriors were as proud of their battle scars as old-time German students were of their dueling wounds, and brought them out more conspicuously by tattooing around them.[30] Bears' claws, horse hair, mules' tails, beads, and other similar
[H11] materials might be appended to the hair or about the body. Bands of rawhide or copper wire served to protect the wrist of the left hand from the slap of the bow string.

Another fancy of the Comanche male was to puncture his ears for rings. "A young man," says Breaks Something, "sees other men have their ears pierced. He comes home and wants to have it done too." This was in late adolescence. The young man asked one of his female relatives to pierce his ears. She took him to the lodge of a woman who had recently had a baby easily, so it would hurt less. There she heated a needle red hot (in the old days she used a cactus spine) and burned six to eight holes all along the helix of one ear. The other was punctured only three or four times. A greased straw was then run through the hole, taken out, regreased, and left in until the wound healed. The boy liked to have all the holes pierced at once, so he could wear all his earrings at once. The old-time earrings were long, thin shells obtained from the Mexicans. A few old men can still be seen who wear circles of brass or silver wire. The many shells were so heavy that the top of the ear bent over under the weight, but the discomfort was borne for the satisfaction it gave. As for the piercing service, it was done for the boy gratis.

291 A Comanche woman clothed herself in buckskin. The luxurious

[28] Abbé Emmanuel Domenech, *Seven Years Residence in the Great Deserts of North America*, II, 281; Humfreville, *Twenty Years among Our Hostile Indians*, 184.
[29] C. and J. D. Smith, *op. cit.*, 47.
[30] Smithwick, *op. cit.*, 178.

and easy to wear. Although there were variations to suit the individual taste and needs, the general pattern remained fairly uniform. A Comanche woman in motion was a graceful sight, with the gorgeous fringes swaying with every movement and the brilliant patterns of beading glittering in the sunlight or firelight.

The woman wore her hair cropped and traced the part line with vermilion, although she seldom went to the trouble of combing or otherwise caring for her hair; it just hung loose. The care that did not go into her hair was devoted to facial make-up. Her eyes were accentuated with red or yellow lines above and below the lids and sometimes crossing at the corners. Her ears were painted red inside, and both cheeks were daubed with a solid red-orange circle or triangle. She also occasionally tattooed her face and breast, and wore bracelets and necklaces. As a parallel to the strong institutional friendship between two men, two Comanche women friends might dress alike.

Little girls, unlike small boys, always wore some form of clothing. A girl wore a breechclout until near the age of puberty, when she donned the buckskin dress. She wore her hair long and in plaits.

Fine clothes were so prized for dressing up that each Comanche had a wardrobe case made of rawhide, called *nat'sakɜna*. It was envelope-shaped, laced together at the edges, and had a tie-down, fold-over flap. Thus it was different from the parfleche, or *ɔyɔ:t*, as the Comanche called the meat bag. In his case he kept his best suit, his leggings, moccasins, blanket, and braid wrappers. It was up to his mother to care for his wardrobe.

If he had a war bonnet or feathers, they were kept separately in a tubular bag, called *tunawɔs*, that could be slung from his waist as he rode his horse, so that they could be ready for instant donning in case of attack. In this bag was also carried war paint, a brush, and a mirror after mirrors became available. If the occasion arose, a Comanche wanted to look his best.

Home to the Comanche was his tipi, or conical skin dwelling. It represented a wonderful combination of utility and portability, for it could be raised or lowered within minutes. It was constructed of tanned buffalo hides sewed together and stretched, flesh side out, over a conical framework of from twelve to thirty poles. The standard number in the opinion of modern Comanches was twenty-two poles.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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place was not readily accessible. In the elevated burial the body was extended at full length, hands to the sides, and placed on robes or blankets, which were then folded closely over it, and the bundle bound with ropes or thongs of rawhide passed many times about the whole. In a few cases war parties buried their dead comrades in a water hole. Buffalo bones or skulls, stones, or something of an identifying nature were sometimes used to mark the spot of burial.[27]

When an old person died, or one whose services were no longer useful, there was little mourning and that for only a short time. On the other hand, when a young man of established fame and prestige as a warrior and hunter was killed, the mourning was intense and prolonged. The name of the dead was not mentioned. To do so was a mark of disrespect, for it revived memories and made relatives and friends prolong their mourning. For a like reason, friends and relatives avoided passing in sight of the grave, and if the band ever came back to an old camping place where a relative had died, his kinsmen began mourning all over again, but "the second mourning was not so severe; the dead can't see them so well." Female relatives testified to their grief by wailing, moaning, and howling. They tore off or removed their customary apparel and wore rags or skin aprons only. They gashed themselves across the face, arms, legs, and breast with a knife, glass, or flint until they sometimes fainted from loss of blood, and then kept the wound raw and irritated for months. Often they cut off their hair, an ear, or a finger. The present explanations for such self-imposed torture is that the pain diverted their thoughts from their grief, but among the Shoshones and Comanches there was a time when women were killed on their husbands' graves, and self-torture may have been accepted as a satisfactory self-immolation. Black paint supplanted the customary red and yellow smeared upon their copper-colored faces.

Sometimes they built a fire and held a funeral dance by marching

[27] This description of Comanche burial is compiled from statements by a number of informants; also, Parker, *op. cit.*, 137; C. and J. D. Smith, *op. cit.*, 53, 132, 162, 170; H. C. Yarrow, "A Further Contribution to the Study of the Mortuary Customs of the North American Indians," B. A. E. *First Annual Report*, 99–100; Richardson, *The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement*, 42; Lee, *op. cit.*, 152; Marcy, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border*, 56; Babb, *op. cit.*, 142, 144; Rodney Glisan, *Journal of Army Life*, 74; James Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West*, 33.

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-1819) 1954 NO6 Comanche 06
Texas

(ca. 1818)

the Indian character. The Comanchees manifest their sensibilities by mourning vehemently for the dead. They continue their lamentations stately, morning and evening, for a length of time proportioned to the affinity and the consequence of the deceased. The women shave their heads and scarify themselves with knives or sharp flints, until they are literally covered with blood. Whether they have derived this practice from the discomfited prophets of Baal, (I Kings 18, 28) is for learned antiquarians to determine. The men set too much value on the velvet softness of their tawny skins, to have them scarred and serrated by so unprofitable a custom; but they will sometimes shave their heads, which is also considered a grievous retrenchment of masculine beauty. At each periodical lament, the bereaved relations assemble unitedly to bewail their departed friend. Tears are shed in copious profusion, accompanied by loud and plaintive strains of hideous dissonance, not unlike the howlings of ravening wolves. The goods and chattels of the deceased, including his tent and all its apparatus, are sometimes burnt; and such of his horses and mules as the avarice of the living will relinquish, are killed in order to be transferred to the hunting grounds of Elysium, for the future benefit and behoof of the dead. It was estimated by eye-witnesses, that during the prevalence of the small-pox among them in 1819, when they were swept off, as with the besom of destruction, there were not less than 5000 of these valuable animals immolated in this manner. The mode of conducting their funeral obsequies, I have never witnessed, and believe they sedulously avoid the observation of strangers of these occasions.

[Note. The length of this letter compels us to divide it. The rest will appear next week.]

[*The Cincinnati Literary Gazette*, June 12, 1824]

Letter IV.

[Concluded]

Vanity, certainly, is not peculiar to the Comanchees, but they possess more vanity both national and personal,

22: Dacus Q-3 (no date) 1960 NO6 Comanche NO6
(ca. 1870)

[ca. 1870]

and he may mutilate or beat her to the full extent of his capricious will. 593
In certain cases he is even permitted to take her life, without acknowledging responsibility to any one for his conduct. As among civilized people, 684
there are "common women of the tribe," outcasts from respectable Comanche society, just as there are outcasts from Christian society among the civilized people of Europe and America. These "Women" have no rights which Comanche ladies and gentlemen are bound to respect. The condition of slavery, which falls to the lot of all women of the tribe, is intensified in the case of the fallen. The others are slaves of one master only; these have many masters and many mistresses. According to our code of morals, the Comanche cyprian has been guilty of no crime, which all the females of the tribe who have arrived at the age of puberty have not committed. She has been unfaithful to the marriage contract, without consulting the wishes of her husband, and without bringing him any gain, and terribly is she made to suffer for it. She is beaten, with many stripes, [304]
and not infrequently suffers mutilation by having her nose cut off. This fixes the brand of her disgrace; and henceforth she becomes the slave of the tribe. There may always be seen a few of these miserable creatures about a Comanche camp. The women are especially cruel toward them, and take much apparent delight in beating them. And yet these same immaculate maidens and matrons have not once, but many times been made to endure the embrace of any purchaser at the behest of their husbands and fathers.

Custom has established laws among the Comanches as among more civil- 671
ized people. It is a law among them that a wife may be mutilated, or even 593
killed, for the crime of infidelity, and yet husband is not averse to select- 684
ing any number of lovers for her and compelling her to accept them, pro- 837
vided his worldly fortune is advanced thereby.

There is no prudish seclusion of Comanche maidens. They mingle with 834
great freedom among the people of their tribe. They may have their 584
beaux as well as their white sisters, and the gallants need have no fears of an over-prudent papa, or an irate "big brother." If there is a rough place in the course of the stream of affection, it is not the youth but the maiden that must suffer the castigation. A pony will suffice to satisfy the utmost requirements of the social law.

When a young Comanche gentleman takes it into his head to go a-wooing, 584
he decks himself with a profusion of paint, a gorgeous head-piece made 301
of feathers; dons his finest suit, puts on all the decorations of distinction 291
which he is entitled to wear, which usually consist of a necklace of wild- 237
cats' claws, coyotes' tails, the canine teeth of wolves, elks' teeth, and not

31: Jones E-5 (1967-1970) 1972 NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

175 178 624 man, if he was fortunate, could become a peace chief, but a peace chief possessed no real authority and functioned most importantly as a mediator in the disputes which arose among the younger men.

175 178 324 [789] 621 [222] With the greater food supply offered by the seemingly boundless bison herds, hunting magic decreased in importance. Antelope magic did persist from the Shoshone heritage. The more favorable living conditions and constant food supply also allowed the individual bands, which had retained their Basin characteristics, to become larger and to achieve a greater degree of independence from their sister bands. The emphasis on the buffalo as a food source also tended to decrease the importance of gathering and exploitation of the floral environment for food. Further, the Comanches made little or no use of fish and of such small game as rabbits (Lowie 1954:6).

175 178 [847] 727 [562] [593] [309] The Basin Shoshone practice of infanticide disappeared as the family group could more efficiently care for its offspring. The practice of enculturating slaves and captives became common among the Comanches in order to augment their numbers and specifically to free males for hunting and warfare. The stress on war and hunting also tended to debase the position of women, and such practices as the mutilation of wives, a custom which had never occurred in Basin Shoshone culture, came into practice.

175 178 771 [776] [715] 778 [715] 754 [578] [721] [796] Patterns of religious belief and behavior also underwent certain changes from Basin life to the Plains. A vaguely defined belief in a Great Spirit persisted, as did the relative lack of concern with the afterlife. However, the intense fear of ghosts held by the Basin Shoshone diminished in the Comanche Plains culture. Also, the practice of power transmission from individual to individual, instead of power source to individual, developed in importance. The decrease in ghost fear and, it is assumed, witchcraft in Comanche culture, as opposed to the Basin culture, was greatly facilitated by the lessening of intrasocial tensions and the Comanches' ability, through warfare, to turn aggressions outward and away from the primary group. As a whole, Comanche religious patterns were exceedingly simple and lacking in elaborate ceremonialism and ritual, at least compared to their Plains neighbors (Hoebel 1940:83).

175 171 [621] [575] 796 [291] [342] The Comanches possessed characteristics, other than their paucity of ceremonialism, which served to differentiate them from other Plains tribes. The Comanche bands were more self-managing than bands found among other Plains groups. Warrior societies, a diagnostic trait of Plains culture, were lacking in Comanche society except in the most rudimentary form. The Sun Dance was not a vital aspect of Comanche culture. Decoration of clothing with beads, quills, and ornaments of bone, shell, and metal was deemphasized, while heavy fringing of the garments was the rule. The Comanche tepee was built on a four-pole base like that of the Blackfoot, Sarsi, Ute, and Shoshone; while the Comanches' historic neighbors, such as the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa-Apache used a three-pole foundation (Lowie 1954:33).

72 [224] By the early nineteenth century the bison herds were greatly diminished on the south Plains, and the Comanches increasingly turned to raiding to augment their economy. During this period the Comanches raided New Mexico, the Santa Fe Trail, northern Texas, and Old Mexico, sometimes as far south as Durango.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

after all, a twelve-year-old Indian boy has only a twelve-year-old Indian boy's head.

My personal feeling is—and I believe anyone who lived around the plains Indians at the turn of the century will agree—that the greatest miracle performed that afternoon was calling the Martny wives back from the hypnotic state of the death wail. This is a deliberate, self-induced mental condition; and when the women have been in it for a sufficient time, they become impervious to pain. They slash their breasts, bodies, and legs; and if the state continues long enough —say into the third day—it is climaxed by their whittling off a finger with their butcher knife. Generally it is the forefinger of the left hand. Women in this thralldom seem to have a high coagulatory content in their blood. Evidence of women's bleeding to death from self-inflicted wounds, when in this hypnotic state, is nil.

Possibly this blood property is a result of the women's heavy meat diet, or it may be a chemical change in the blood brought on by the severe hysterical state under which they are laboring. One thing old plainsmen are agreed on: Indian women are extremely dangerous when in the wail, and even their own menfolks give them a wide berth.

Because this state is deliberate and self-imposed, they resent being called back to normalcy. It is entered into to escape a sorrow—something they cannot face in their normal state. Perhaps their minds become as blank to sorrow as their bodies do to pain. In a way it is the kind of thinking a drinker uses, when he stultifies his senses with liquor to forget his inadequacy. Of this I am sure—I could never myself have the courage to call three wailing Comanche women back to sanity.

I think of three things happening that day that we can properly label phenomena. First is the dragging of this boy by a frantic horse, through the brush and timber of West Cache, for more than two hours, without the horse's ever once kicking or stepping directly on Albert's head or rib cage. The Bone-setter must have diagnosed these facts, and Dr. McLain must have overlooked them.

Phenomenon number two is a strange cowboy's riding through the country, chancing upon this isolated camp, and seeking food at that exact time. Number three is, of course, that this particular stray cowboy had the courage and willingness to take on a job shunned by a trained, educated doctor, and the skill to turn out a workmanlike job.